



# MOUNTAINS RECREATION & CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: The Governing Board

FROM:  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Officer

DATE: June 23, 2003

SUBJECT: **Agenda Item XIII: Consideration of resolution authorizing the acquisition of conservation easements over all, or a portion, of APN 2380-040-006 adjacent to the Mulholland Drive and the Universal Scenic Overlook using private funds and authorizing the acceptance of any funding sources for said acquisition, Los Angeles.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Governing Board adopt the attached resolution authorizing the acquisition of conservation easements over all, or a portion, of APN 2380-040-006 adjacent to the Mulholland Drive and the Universal Scenic Overlook using private funds and authorizing the acceptance of any funding sources for said acquisition.

Background: The subject 15-acre property is located along the north side of Mulholland Drive in Studio City. The Universal Scenic Overlook is situated in the Mulholland Drive right-of-way by the southeast corner of the property. This north-facing property contains some of the most important habitat in the Santa Monica Mountains between Laurel Canyon Boulevard and the Cahuenga Pass. Staff refers to the property as the "Wrightwood habitat block." The large undivided parcel is a critical element in the intra-mountain range habitat linkage between the recently acquired 52-acre Briar Summit property and 17-acre Oakshire Canyon parcel. Mule deer use of the site is equal to any other portion of the Santa Monica Mountains east of the 405 Freeway.

An adjacent landowner recently acquired the property to remove it from the ownership of an individual that wanted to maximize its development. The buyer approached staff regarding a bargain sale using the remaining funds in Acquisition Area C of the Santa Monica Mountains Open Space Preservation District No. 1. However, because of the required geographical distribution of that remaining funding, it should be spent on the west side of Laurel Canyon where no Area C assessment district acquisitions have been made to date. The property is entirely on the District No. 1 Final Engineers Report.

The solution agreed to by staff and the recent buyer is for the Mountains Recreation and Conservation (MRCA) to acquire a conservation easement over approximately

95 percent of the property. The only allowable use within the easement would be the construction and maintenance of a maximum five-foot-wide private equestrian trail loop trail. That trail could be developed on any portion of the property. The maximum 5 percent portion of the property (<1.0 acre) not covered by the conservation easement would be available for an equestrian facility to accommodate up to five horses. No portion of the steep parcel would be graded for a riding rink. A condition of the transaction is that the MRCA secure the support of the 4<sup>th</sup> District Council office (Councilmember Tom LeBonge) and the Mulholland Design Review Board. In addition staff must demonstrate that such a facility is allowed per all applicable codes, ordinances and zoning.

The difficult part is that staff and the neighborhood will have to raise a considerable amount of private funding. The proposed conservation easement price is far below its market value but nonetheless an amount exceeding \$100,000. The alternative appears to be that the recent buyer will sell it for development.

Acquisition of the subject conservation easement is critical to maintain the ecological vitality of the Santa Monica Mountains ecosystem east of Laurel Canyon Boulevard, to maintain one of the premier Mulholland Scenic Parkway viewsheds, and to provide substantial general benefit contribution to the MRCA's required match to the Santa Monica Mountains Open Space Preservation District.

The final terms and cost of the easement will be presented with the owner's permission in open session or with a confidential memorandum at the Governing Board meeting.